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CENTCOM FOR ADMIRAL FALLON FROM AMBASSADOR GRAPPO

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR CENTCOM COMMANDER ADMIRAL WILLIAM
[J](#). FALLON'S VISIT TO OMAN

REF: A. MUSCAT 00416
[J](#)B. MUSCAT 00829

Classified By: Classified By: AMBASSADOR GARY A. GRAPPO FOR REASONS 1.4
(B) AND (D)

Welcome

[J](#)1. (C) Embassy Muscat and I warmly welcome your return to Oman. Since your visit here four months ago, Oman continues to be concerned with regional issues, especially events in Iraq and Iran, participated in the June Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD) meeting in Washington, D.C., and was struck by a major tropical cyclone (from which it is still recovering).

Regional Issues

[J](#)2. (C) Oman maintains a unique perspective on regional concerns as compared to its GCC neighbors. The Omani leadership is generally satisfied with its relationship with Iran, preferring dialogue and cooperation on mutual maritime security and other shared interests, rather than isolating the regime in Tehran. It is less certain about the extent to which Iran may pose a threat. Leaders in Oman,s military and security services -) which take a more pragmatic view than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) -- worry about growing instability in the region resulting from expansionist Iranian policies, which they fear could provoke a strong and unsettling reaction from other states. However, they increasingly argue that extremism and sectarianism in Iraq pose an equal or greater danger to regional stability (and to Oman) than does Iran.

[J](#)3. (C) Oman remains generally supportive of our efforts to promote security and political stability in Iraq, but is very concerned that Prime Minister Maliki does not have effective control over Iraqi security forces or the stature to lead the country over the long-term. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to be a source of high-level interest; the Omani government has cautiously welcomed the President,s proposed Middle East peace conference to re-establish dialogue towards finding a resolution, but would like to see inclusive participation (i.e., Syria, Lebanon and other Arab and Muslim

countries).

Gulf Security Dialogue

¶4. (S/NF) Due in part to Gonu-related recovery operations, no Ministry of Defense officials attended the last GSD meeting held in June in Washington, D.C. MFA Under Secretary Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi represented Oman at the talks and repeated the MFA's position that Iran is not a direct threat to Oman and should be positively engaged by the international community to change its behavior, rather than confronted with sanctions, as this will only strengthen the hand of hard-liners in Tehran. Currently, from an Omani perspective, the hardware at the center of the GSD's military pillar (BADI and Patriot missiles) does not hold much appeal to the Omanis due to cost concerns -- Oman's military budget is small compared to the rest of the GCC -- and the leadership's opinion that an Iranian missile attack is unlikely. Oman would instead like to modernize its military capability, both defensive and deterrent (MLRS/ATACMS), to help counter asymmetrical and other more likely threats. As this Mission outlined in a recent review of GSD-related needs (ref B), they are hoping for, and would in fact need, some sort of creative or alternative financing through the GSD in order to do so quickly.

Tropical Cyclone Gonu

¶5. (C) In early June, tropical cyclone (i.e. hurricane) Gonu hit the northern and central coasts of Oman hard. While wind

and tidal damage was limited, heavy rains quickly overwhelmed the numerous valleys/wadis and caused extensive flooding and major damage to homes and infrastructure, particularly in the Muscat area. The cost of total damage caused by the storm exceeds USD 2 billion. Private estimates of the number of dead and missing fall between 500 and 1,000 (though the official figure was frozen at 49). Gonu was without recent precedent and the rains and resultant flooding quickly overwhelmed the capital area's infrastructure and emergency services. Flooding washed out several major roads in and out of the capital, destroyed a number of bridges, temporarily closed the airport, shut down both of the capital's two power stations and desalination plants, and compromised both cellular and landline communication networks. Search and rescue operations, as well as a major portion of the recovery operations, were conducted by the Sultan's Armed Forces and the Royal Oman Police.

¶6. (C) Although the Embassy made several offers for assistance (NAVCENT, in particular, was in a position to lend immediate assistance if needed) before, during and directly after the storm, the Government of Oman politely declined all aid. Omani officials have told the Embassy the offers were turned down for two primary reasons: a) the damage and loss of life, while severe, were not catastrophic and Oman had both the assets and personnel to conduct rescue and recovery operations on its own; and b) the belief that foreign assistance sometimes comes with a certain price tag -- including the need to divert Omani assets to coordinate and work with foreign entities, and in the case of other nations (not necessarily the U.S.), future political baggage. (Note: It appears Oman accepted financial assistance from Saudi Arabia and several other GCC countries, but declined all other offers of aid. The USG donated USD 50,000 to a local charity organization. End Note.)

Impact of Gonu on Military Plans

¶7. (S/NF) Post-cyclone recovery operations have gone very well and most of the capital is back to normal operations. However, the high cost of Gonu, along with declining FMF and

the skyrocketing cost of construction, will delay or cancel future major acquisitions for the Sultan,s Armed Forces. Royal Army of Oman (RAO) officers, for example, previously told OMC that the RAO would be moving forward on HIMARS/ATACMS as part of its artillery upgrade, but now do not see this proceeding in the next few years. Furthermore, while Omani officials are proud of their response to the storm, they readily admit that there are a number of areas in which they need to improve, such as interagency coordination and communications. As such, Oman may be more interested in attending or possibly hosting future Consequence Management exercises.

Your Meetings with Omani Officials

18. (C) Your trip to Oman will occur at the beginning of Ramadan and some of the officials you see may accordingly be a bit distracted with ongoing family, religious and social commitments associated with this period. Nevertheless, Omani officials likely will want to receive an update on the situations in Iraq, including the U.S. political response to the recent Iraq report to Congress, and Afghanistan, as well as on current U.S. thinking regarding Iran. As you recall from your last visit, Sultan Qaboos remains concerned about the Salafist doctrine being spread from Saudi Arabia, as well as Shi,a expansionism out of Iran.

19. (U) In conclusion, the overall Oman-U.S. military-to-military relationship remains solid. The day-to-day interaction is candid and constructive, with a strong spirit of cooperation on both sides. We look forward to using your visit to strengthen this already sound relationship.

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